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Religion on Campus: Part 2

Religious Strength Maintained on Campus

PRINCETON, N.J. — Colleges sometimes are viewed as godless places where students can expect to lose their beliefs, but a special survey commissioned by the Princeton Religion Research Center suggests that just the opposite often is true.

A majority of the undergraduate college students in the survey (55%) said that their religious beliefs are very important to them. Additionally, 30% said their beliefs are somewhat important. Only 11% asserted their beliefs are not important, and 5% stated they have no beliefs or could not state their importance. By comparison, among young people ages 18 to 24 in the general population, only 44% say their beliefs are very important, while 36% say they are fairly important and 19% that they are not very important.

Half of the students say that their religious commitment has not changed since they entered college. The remaining students are divided, with a slight edge going to those who report their commitment has become stronger, compared to those who say it has become weaker. One undergraduate in 10 (10%) says his commitment is now much stronger, and 17% report it is a little stronger. Among those whose commitment has diminished, 16% say it is a little weaker, and 6% that it is much weaker.

No difference in reports of the importance of religion is found between upperclassmen and lowerclassmen. There is a slightly greater tendency for upperclassmen to say their commitment to religion is weaker since entering college, but the difference is only marginally statistically significant.

The level of spiritual commitment and sense of importance of belief usually is much stronger among young women than among young men on campus. Two women in three (66%) say their religious beliefs are very important to them, compared to only 44% of the young men who give similar reports. The proportion of women who say their religious commitment is stronger is greater than that of those who say they have lost this commitment, by a margin of 32% to 20%. Young men are about evenly divided between those who say their commitment is stronger (23%) and those who say it has become weaker (25%).

Catholic students are more likely than Protestant youth to say their commitment to religion has weakened since entering college, and also are less apt to say their religious beliefs are very important to them. A slim majority of Catholics (52%) rate their religious beliefs as very important, while 40% say they are only fairly important, 8% not important. By comparison, 65% of the Protestant youth attending college say their religious beliefs are very important to them. The number of Protestant college students whose commitment has grown stronger outnumber those who have become weaker by 33% to 25%. Among Catholics, 26% report a weakened commitment to religion, compared to 21% who say it has become stronger.

Students earning straight A's are only somewhat more likely than others to say their religious beliefs are very important to them, but they are far more likely to report their spiritual commitment has not changed (59%) or has grown stronger (28%) since entering college than to say it has weakened (13%). At the opposite extreme, among those maintaining a C grade-point average, only 40% say their commitment is unchanged, while 35% report a strengthening and 25% a weakening.

Students from colleges located in the South are the most likely to say religion is very important to them (65%). Those from eastern colleges are least inclined to rate religion as being very important in their lives (23%) or to report growth in commitment to religion since entering college (23%).

The survey was conducted among a representative national sample of 545 undergraduate college students. Interviews were conducted in person on the campuses of 98 colleges and universities during the period of October 17-28, 1988. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects does not exceed plus or minus 6 percentage points.

NEXT MONTH: Belief in God and in the divinity of Jesus Christ by college students are examined in this continuing series on their religious beliefs and practices.

Religious Commitment Since Entering College

The Question: Since you have been in college, has your religious commitment become much stronger, a little stronger, a little weaker, much weaker, or has there been no change?

	Stronger	No change	Weaker
	%	%	%
Total undergraduates	**27**	**50**	**23**
Gender			
Male	23	52	25
Female	32	48	20
Class			
Lowerclassmen	28	51	22
Upperclassmen	26	48	26
Grade point average			
A	28	59	13
B	25	51	24
C	35	40	25
Region			
East	23	53	24
Midwest	29	47	24
South	28	49	23
West	29	51	20
Religious affiliation			
Protestant	33	42	25
Catholic	21	53	26

Importance of Religious Beliefs

The Questions: How important to you are your religious beliefs: very important, fairly important, not too important, not at all important?

	Very important	Fairly important	Not important
	%	%	%
Total undergraduates	**55**	**30**	**11**
Gender			
Male	44	35	15
Female	66	24	6
Class			
Lowerclassmen	55	30	10
Upperclassmen	54	30	12
Grade point average			
A	58	19	14
B	54	31	11
C	55	33	8
Region			
East	42	37	14
Midwest	58	29	11
South	65	25	7
West	54	27	12
Religious Affiliation			
Protestant	65	27	7
Catholic	52	40	8

No opinion, no beliefs (5%, total) omitted.

Teens Approve of Mission Work As Substitute For National Service

The debate on youth and national service is gaining momentum in Washington. President Bush has been emphasizing voluntary efforts through his "Point of Light" Foundation and "YES" (Youth Engaged in Service). The Democratic majority in Congress has introduced at least half a dozen bills that call for providing material rewards to young people who enroll in national service. The legislative proposals that are now making progress through congressional committees include both expansion of existing programs such as the Peace Corps and VISTA, and the creation of ambitious pilot programs that would award young people up to $10,000 to $12,000 a year, plus living expenses, for giving military or non-military service to their country.

The George H. Gallup International Foundation conducted a special study among teen-agers to test their receptivity to the national service proposals. Recognizing that paid service would represent strong competition for voluntary efforts, including those by Church missions, the study included attitudes towards volunteerism and specifically, approval of substitution of mission work for government programs.

Upon first hearing about national service, a slight majority of teens say they would approve of plans that would require all young men (55%) or young women (50%) to give one year's service to the nation. If service were required, 53% of the young men say they would prefer the military, while 72% of the young women would like to do non-military service such as helping the elderly or working in hospitals. In general, 75% of the teens say they would prefer to do service in the U.S., while 22% would like instead to serve in a foreign country.

When teens are asked about their willingness to serve under a plan such as that sponsored by Sen. Sam Nunn and Rep. Dave McCurdy, that would award stipends of $10,000 a year for non-military service and $12,000 for military service, nine in 10 say they would be interested in serving under such a plan, including 54% who would be "very interested."

Approve Church Substitution

If mandatory national service should become a reality in the next decade, religious leaders may take comfort in the finding that seven teens in 10 (70%) say they would approve of substituting mission work for the church for national service, *provided the churches and not the government paid the young people.*

Teens often view national service as a potential means of obtaining funds for education (74%) or to gain work experience (65%), but a majority of 57% also recognize that national service would provide a very important opportunity for them to help others.

Young people often view service as a way of affording many of our youth a second chance in life. Nine teens in 10 would approve of service programs that would give youthful drug offenders the opportunity to straighten themselves out. Eight in 10 believe that high school dropouts should be given the opportunity to get their diplomas while performing service.

The findings are based on telephone interviews with a representative national cross section of 500 teen-agers, 13 through 17, conducted June 21 to July 9, 1989. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects does not exceed plus or minus 6 percentage points.

Information about the study reported above and future studies about national service and related programs can be obtained from:

The George H. Gallup International Foundation
100 Palmer Square
Princeton, NJ 08542

Parents of Private School Students Set Different Priorities

"Preppies" attending exclusive ivy-clad New England boarding schools account for only a very small percentage of the nation's private school students. Instead, most private school students commute from home to schools that usually are run by a local religious-based group. About two-thirds of these students attend a Catholic institution. Overall, 6% of Americans have chosen to send their children to private schools, compared to 28% whose children attend the public schools.

While both public and private school parents tend to agree that education is important, they often disagree on the purposes and methods of education.

When public school parents are asked, for example, what they think are the reasons that people want their children to get an education, 70% cite financial reasons or economic gain. Only 55% of the private school parents give similar responses. Instead, 68% of the private school parents emphasize that school is a preparation for a better life; a view shared by only 47% of public school parents.

Both public and private school parents agree that substance abuse is the biggest problem facing the local schools. Secondarily, however, more public school parents are concerned about the lack of financial support for their schools (18%) and overcrowded conditions (11%). Private school parents share these concerns to a lesser extent, but are far more inclined to view lack of standards (23%), moral laxity (10%), and lack of respect for teachers and students (7%) as the major problems afflicting the local public schools.

Further differences in attitudes towards education are noted according to the educational reforms favored by the respective groups. Public school parents (77%) more than private school parents (69%) would like to see more after-school and summer programs for the children of working parents. Private school parents place greater emphasis upon such reforms as national achievement standards and goals (80%) and community service graduation requirements (69%).

Not surprisingly, public school parents are more likely than the private school parents to grade the local public schools as doing A or B work, by a margin of 57% to 35%. Private school parents most often regard the local schools as just average (36%) or deficient in quality (21%).

The results are based on 1,584 personal interviews with a national sample of 1,584 adults conducted by Gallup for Phi Delta Kappa, the national professional society of educators, in May–June, 1989. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects does not exceed plus or minus 3 percentage points.

For information about obtaining copies of the full reports, please write to Gallup Poll/Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789.

Public Mobilizing for Crusade Against Drugs

The newly formed George H. Gallup International Foundation released two very important studies in August on the attitudes of American adults and teens towards drugs and the drug crisis. The surveys showed that most Americans are fed up with drugs and want to take action. The clergy, however, receives only lukewarm recognition for its potential role as anti-drug speakers.

- The public now identifies drugs as the leading problem facing the nation (27% of the adults, 32% of the teens surveyed). Six teens in 10 (60%) now say that drug abuse is the biggest problem facing their generation.

- This concern is not just something people see on television or read in the newspapers, but often is based upon personal contact with the drug crisis. Half of the adults (49%) say drug use is at least fairly widespread in their neighborhoods, and 37% report they know of drug sellers near home. One teen in four (23%) has been given the opportunity to buy or use drugs in the past 30 days. Incredibly, 18% of all adults report they have at least some friends who are users, and 9% number drug sellers among their acquaintances. Among teens, 19% report they have friends who are sellers, and four teens in 10 report that drug selling and use at school is at least fairly widespread. In the work place, 26% of adults report drug use, and 15% selling.

- The public favors the full range of deterrents and preventive measures. Interdiction and stiffer penalties for both users and sellers most frequently are mentioned, but majorities of the public also favor greater education and more compassion for addicts through treatment and counseling.

- The good news is that many people, young and old, already are taking positive actions and bearing witness against drugs by discussing the dangers with others, urging someone to say "no" to drugs, changing their own attitudes or behavior, or urging a user to seek help or drug counseling. Half of the adults (48%) and three teens in four (75%) would be willing to volunteer time to programs for drug prevention, education, or treatment.

Clergy Rate "So-So" as Anti-Drug Speakers

Teens believe that former addicts giving their own stories, sports figures, and rock stars would be very effective in warning students of their own age about drugs. Physicians and policemen would be very effective, according to one teen in three, but only one in four holds similar views about the clergy or scientists. Least effective in the opinion of teens would be their teachers or members of Congress.

Ministers, priests, or rabbis would be very effective in the opinion of 24% of the teens, but only "somewhat effective" in the estimate of 41%. "Somewhat" on scales of this nature usually can be interpreted as dismissing a group or idea with faint praise. An additional 34% do not believe that members of the clergy would be at all effective as anti-drug speakers. Protestant teens are more likely than Catholics to view the potential role of the clergy very positively, by a margin of 30% to 18%.

A limited number of summaries of the results of the studies are available from the Foundation. Those who can afford it, are asked to consider a tax-deductible donation of $7.75 for the 28-page summary. Send requests or payments to:

The George H. Gallup International Foundation
100 Palmer Square
Princeton, NJ 08542

To Spend A Day With Jesus

On a nationwide telephone survey taken by the Gallup Poll in March 1989, a sample of 500 adults was read a list of eight prominent figures in history and asked to name those they would most like to spend a day with. Nearly two in three (63%) named Jesus Christ as the person they most would like to meet on that memorable day. An additional 7% named him as their second choice.

Three in four Protestants and Catholics (75%, each) name Jesus Christ as their first or second choice. Only half (37%) of those who do not state a Christian religious affiliation express a similar preference. Most interested in meeting Christ are blacks (95%), residents of the South (77%), and people who are 50 and older (76%).

Named with some frequency are Abraham Lincoln (33%) and George Washington (28%). Lincoln finds greatest favor among Protestants (38%), while Washington enjoys his greatest popularity among Catholics (34%).

In the secular world, Leonardo da Vinci (15%) edges out John Wayne (14%) by only an insignicant percentage point. Cleopatra continues to exert her charms over the centuries for one person in 10 (11%), but comparatively few people show any interest in engaging either Joan of Arc (7%) or Napoleon Bonaparte (5%) in conversation.

Person Would Most Like to Meet for a Day
(First and second choices, combined)

The Question: *If you could spend a day visiting with one of the following people, which one would you choose? And who would be your second choice?*

	Total	Protes-tant	Cath-olic	No Christian affiliation
Jesus Christ	70%	75%	75%	37%
Abraham Lincoln	33	38	25	24
George Washington	28	29	34	13
Leonardo da Vinci	15	12	18	17
John Wayne	14	14	10	17
Cleopatra	11	9	12	13
Joan of Arc	7	3	9	12
Napoleon	5	5	2	6

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PRINCETON RELIGION RESEARCH CENTER
P.O. Box 310
53 Bank Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542

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